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SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT  
LAWRENCE

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W: ...are very cynical, because they look down on anybody that hasn't got a college degree. They don't think they can talk on their level. Well when I work with them they certainly found out that I could talk on their level, and a little bit more beyond.

Y: So they were surprised. Well they respected me. I drew a lot of respect from the engineering department, the inspection department, all departments knew that anything sent down to me had to be correct paperwork. They had to have the right count of the part they're sending out and what it is. The classification of it. Unclear, and they found out that they couldn't just run me to the ground, or tell me what to do. I didn't tell them what to do, but they tried to tell me what to do. And I always had an understanding with the foreman that if anybody started to step on my toes, I would go him instead of trying to iron it out myself. And that way there, they found out through my foreman I had one job to do and I was doing it correctly, and nobody else was going to change the system.

Y: You are retired from Honeywell, right? (W: Umhm) You did not work afterwards?

W: No. I was sixty-eight when I retired.

Y: And when you quit working in the textile, it was Wood Mill, or (--)

W: Wood Mill. No, when I quit working in Textiles it was in Marland's, Marland Mills in Andover, the last textile.

Y: Is there any, I'm curious, is there, did you feel different because you were textile worker, and now you are a high tech company worker?

W: No, no. You take that in stride. You knew you bettered yourself right off the bat. I mean as

soon as you got hired in electronics, your pay doubled automatically. If I was getting five dollars an hour, I certainly was making ten in electronics. That was the difference. See, a lot of people tried to get into electronics, but they couldn't.

Y: How did you come in so easily?

W: Well they had a system, and it's a very good system. It was by word of mouth. Now you could be husband and wife, and you couldn't get your husband in, but somebody else who knew you, you, the husband, said you were a darn good worker, they would hire you on a basis of what you said. And in nine times out of ten it turned out to be true. That man was a good worker, or the woman was a good worker. So that's how they hired their people. But it was by word of mouth broadcast to certain people. Do you know anybody that's any good? It was an underground movement practically. Maybe he wasn't in the newspapers or anything, it was by word of mouth. And if you ever brought in somebody who was a bum, you know about it. They'd tell you about it. Don't ever bring anybody in there again. And they would never ask you again to recommend anybody.

Y: Yeah, I think I asked you that question last time. Did you get in trouble with your age? How old were you when you (--)

W: At the end they were starting to push age.

Y: They, who are they?

W: Management?

Y: Honeywell management?

W: Management.

Y: Honeywell management? (W: Oh yes) Yeah?

W: If you were nearing sixty-five, they'd be dropping hints. Oh, you're turning sixty-five next week huh? Did you ever think of that? Retiring? In my case that God my supervisor and I got along, but he forgot until one day he looked up my records, he almost, he almost died. He says, you're sixty-eight years old Bill, and you're still in here? So I knew from that tone of voice, time to go! Now I was legally suppose to work till 70. That was the law, but by innuendoes constantly reminding you how old you are, you didn't have to be a genius to know that they wanted you out. That's what happened to my wife. My wife turned sixty-four, and right off the bat, the minute she turned sixty-four she started receiving, oh, you're near retirement age. Oh, it's time for you to start thinking, you know, about retiring. Not quitting, start thinking about retiring. So every industry is. Even today they're doing it. You know it's hard to get a job nowadays if you're forty years old and up. Forget it.

Y: No, I meant after you quit working the textile mills and started looking for a job. Did they ask you how old you were? Because I heard that some people were (--) Some people(--)

W: Oh yes. Oh no, the minute I got hired I had to tell them how old I was. I was almost forty-eight years old when they hired me.

Y: How many? Forty? (W: Forty-eight) Forty-eight!

W: No, wait a minute, I'll tell you how old I was. I retired when I was sixty-seven, five years ago. So that would be close to forty-eight. (Y: Forty-eight) Yeah, because I was hired in [unclear], I was hired in 1966. I was born in 1914. So I was fifty-two years old.

Y: They did not give you a hard time (--)

W: Not a bit, not a bit. As a matter of fact I loved working for that company, because it was like going from a sweat box to the country club. Working conditions were fantastic. The foremen were good. The supervisors were good. The people were good. Nobody killed you. You worked at a certain pace, they appreciated it, and they let you do it. Not nowadays. I don't think they let you do that now.

Y: But you told me last time you liked the job in the Wood Mill, when you were working as spinner, or something?

W: I was a yarn boy.

Y: No, no, no. (W: Yeah.) When you made a lot of money.

W: That was a mule spinner in the Pacific Mills. (Y: Yeah) That's when I worked, I worked over twenty-five years in the Pacific Mills. Then I went to Marland Mills. Then I went to Honeywell.

Y: Anyway, what I remember what you told me, you made one hundred and twenty some dollars, while other people were making twenty dollars.

W: No, not twenty, forty, forty dollars. I think the average wage then was about forty, forty-five dollars. When the NRA came in it was a dollar an hour.

Y: So I thought that was the job you liked the most?

W: That was the job I liked the most, because that's the job I made the most money, and that was my own boss. I worked at any speed that I wanted to. It was piece work. And I worked at any speed. If I felt like working, I worked. If I didn't feel like working, I'd dog it, but I wouldn't get as much money at the end of the week.

Y: And after the retirement, you're sixty-seven years old. Did you miss the work environment, people?

W: I worked alone. I worked out of my own office. I worked all alone. I met people through

my work, but there was nobody to help me, I told you that before. I worked absolutely alone. A lone wolf, just like the statue of liberty.

Y: So if you did not miss people, did you miss your work? (W: Well) How important was the work in other words?

W: Well it meant losing an order if I didn't get certain material out. See, at the (--)

Y: What do you mean out? You comment unclear.

W: Well supposing now I had a line shut down, because this part here was defective. And they gave it to me to be sent out and repaired by the vendor and shipped back by air. I shipped it out by air, and it came back by air, because time was of essence. Well if I didn't do the job right, and didn't ship it out right, they'd be a lot of people after me that would have my throat in five minutes. What happened? Why didn't you do it? What happened? That's the first thing they tell you.

Y: Did it ever happen?

W: Close. A couple of times it was close. But I find out that people, some people, no matter what they have, or what they want, it's an emergency. So what I used to do is call up people. If it was an engineer I would call his boss and determine from the boss how important that item was. And he told me, I don't care when it gets in. That gives me plenty of time to do the job. But see, everybody thinks his job is more important than anybody else's, especially when they're in the high echelon. I mean if they're engineers, or if they're buyers. That's where they buy material for the shops, or they could be, they worked in the main office with the big wheels. They're all important, believe me, but after awhile you find out who is important, and who isn't. And from that you work. And you'd be surprised how many friends you get that way.

Y: Yeah. My question was, after you were retired, did you think your job was really important, so suddenly you did not have any job? (W: Well) What was your feeling?

W: Well I wouldn't say I was the most important cog in the machine. I was only one cog in a little machine. But I'll tell you one thing, if I ever stopped, the big cogs would stop. I wasn't important, but I was just important enough to make somebody realize there is something wrong in the shipping room that didn't go out today. We're going to have to wait a week now.

Y: So how important was your job to you?

W: Not very. It was a daily thing. I mean I'd go in, and I knew what I had to do, and I did it. I had no worries about anybody, unless I got a smart alec of a supervisor to try and step all over me. Then I had recourse to go to my supervisor and have a talk with him. And then he would talk to that supervisor, and things would get ironed out beautifully.

Y: And so you did not have any so called identity crisis that you don't suddenly have a job, and uh (--)

W: Oh, I was threatened of being fired if this didn't happen, if this didn't ship, or that didn't ship. Oh, there was some people that thought they were Jesus Christ himself. That they were so important that you had to do it. I found out that a lot of them, nine times out of ten, they were lying. [Unclear], and a lot of times I found out that people are funny. Now you take a buyer, he goes out and he buys materials for Honeywell. It could be screws, it could be panels, it could be soldering irons, it could be a million other items. He'll let that thing lay on his desk, the order, the requisition, what we used to call it, on his desk till the last minute. Before the deadline. In other words, if this isn't out by June the 31st, and he's got it on his desk June the 30th, he'd give it to me and he'd say, "I want this out right away." I say, "you didn't give me enough time. I can't, it's impossible." Oh, then all hell would break loose, because it's his job now, not mine. Because he let that lay there for almost a whole month before bringing it down to me. So I'd go to my supervisor and say, "Ray, look at this, forget it. Do it tomorrow." I was covered. There was a lot of people like that, believe me. You'd be surprised how people are lazy. Oh God are they lazy some of them, especially college people. They always seem to think anybody below them is nothing but insignificant. An ant on an ant hill.

Y: Useless.

W: Useless, right, but they found out quick enough.

Y: So did you always try to do your best?

W: Oh yes. (Y: always?) Always. Always. Always. I took pride in my work. As a matter of fact I had people come down and ask me how to do things. And I showed them how to do things, and they went back up and did it my way, and thanked me very much what I told them. Of course I had a knowledge of how to ship and pack. That was my whole life practically.

Y: Yeah. There are not many people like you I thought, that, who took pride of their jobs, did they? Am I wrong?

W: Well I'll tell you, it got so around the shop they could tell by the package who did it. My handwork was right on there. It was just like you could tell a painting and who painted it. Who did that sculpture. You knew who the sculptor was. Oh, that package, oh Bill put that up. Oh jeeze, take that and put it on, underneath a steam roller, it will never break. That was the reputation I had gotten.

Y: So you expected recognition obviously after doing a good job?

W: Well that was a hard thing to get, is recognition. (Y: hard thing?) Yes, very hard. Nobody want to give you credit. They figured it might go to your head. I mean the person did a good job, the first thing that would be said about them would be, "that's a good worker, trust him." That's the only recognition you ever got. You wouldn't get anymore money, because you were locked into your jobs by the grade that you, that they accessed you at. They had maybe ten grades, from one to ten. One was the lowest, ten was the highest. You follow what I'm saying? Like if you were a number one grade, you were probably getting six dollars an hour. If you were on number ten grade you were probably getting fourteen dollars an hour.

Y: Who puts you in those grades, your supervisor?

W: Yourself, you yourself, just by examination, by tests. They have tests. They give you certain amount of questions. If you answer them, you get that job. But just because you answer the questions, you also are liable to do the job as you said you could do the job. If you couldn't do it, you were downgraded. In other words, you might have been a five, you could go back to a four. It's less money.

Y: In textile, did they recognize people's work and compliment them?

W: Textiles, you were just a blank. You were just a name on a piece of paper, textiles. That's all.

Y: They did not, the supervisor, second hand, and uh, (--)

W: Never, never, never gave you any.

Y: The overseer.

W: Never gave you any encouragement. If you fit, textile was a funny thing. Textiles had a lot of people that were favorites. People who go up to the boss' house and give him money. People go up the the boss' house and give him vegetables and meat. That was a known racket, especially in the Wood Mill.

Y: Any ethnic, certain ethnic group?

W: Italians. Mostly Italians. As a matter of fact, when I worked in the Wood Mill I would say 92% of the people I work with were Italians. And they bought presents for the boss. They bought presents for the supervisor. I hated to see that.

Y: They did it openly?

W: Openly, sure! They weren't scared to show it, especially the woman. The woman were the easiest ones to do that. [Unclear] favor with the boss so they get the best work. Somebody else would be, some woman, some poor woman like on the winding where I was working, she, her yarn would be breaking every five seconds, where this other Italian woman, she'd be sitting down like this for hours and watching just the thing go back and forth, never break. And she'd making money left and right, this one over here can't even make a dollar an hour. It's not right.

Y: I wonder what she did? Uh, what kind of present?

W: [Chuckles] I never knew. I never knew. But they had their own, believe me, there were favorites.

Y: I heard that those overseers and some section hands had girl friends, although they were

married.

W: Of course. Sure they were married some of them. Oh yeah, that was (--)

Y: Wasn't there any social pressure on them? I mean friend, family. Lawrence is a small place if uh (--)

W: Lawrence was a small place, but it had a hell of a lot of people at that time.

Y: Well you know, if a woman does something which is considered not correct, wouldn't she (--)

W: Oh, they didn't look down upon her. Don't forget, you miss one great point. There are a lot of ethnic groups in Lawrence. What was all right for one wasn't all right for another ethnic group.

Y: I mean within the same ethnic group I can imagine, let's say it is the ethnic group A, and the person, the woman does something which was not acceptable by the other groups.

W: That's done undercover. That's not done up openly. That's done after work, or they call up by telephone. That's how a lot of that stuff is done. It was coercion on the boss' part. They were bosses. They were bosses in the sense they could hire you and fire you right on the spot. That was a bad system.

Y: Yeah. I also heard from woman that some, some unclear section hands who would pinch them.

W: Oh!

Y: Did you hear any stories like that?

W: All the people I worked for, no. Maybe some other departments did, yes.

Y: Such things did not happen in Honeywell? I mean stories you heard (--)

W: You mean going out with the (--) Well there were a few girls, yes, but mostly the girls that went out with the supervisors were single girls. They weren't married woman. There were a (--) I don't care where you go, you'll always find two, or three in a group that will be different than the whole bunch of them. It's the same the world over. It's not just Honeywell. It's everywhere.

Y: Well it's also not necessarily correct. One group sees the other group in a certain way. For example they say, oh, French Canadian girls, we call them loose, loose girls. What does, what does it mean loose girls. They did not even do the things (--)

W: Well they were known almost as common street walkers, all right. (Y: chuckles) That's what it is! That's what is loose.

Y: [Comment unclear]

W: Yes, loose. They didn't care about morals. They were loose with their morals. What does that mean. Just analyze that. Loose. Something you can play with. Correct?

Y: But uh, it depend how you define loose. I mean uh, (–)

W: Yes. But uh (–)

Y: I mean loose in those days might be different than today.

W: I don't think so. It was just another work to cover up for what are you calling street walker, that's all. There are all kinds of names. You'd call it a common streets walker, some call them whores, some call them [unclear], some call them a woman paid for.

Y: Yeah.

W: There's a million names for them.

Y: And are there other such reputations? No necessarily bad, but other reputations of other ethnic groups you remember?

W: Well how could you say there were other groups. If there were they were in the minority, because other ethnic groups were in the minority. Mostly Italians in this city. Don't forget, they were the biggest, they were the biggest ethnic group in Lawrence. So the French came next. Now after them probably the Polish and the Lithuanians came after them, and the Germans after them. But they were the real minority. The French and the Italians [unclear]. Well you just look at your city you'll see, oh yeah, and Irish too. But the Irish didn't work too much in textiles. I don't know why? They were more like politicians. They got on the city, they got on the state. The reason for that was very obvious. They could speak English, whereas these people couldn't. They had a big jump. There was a lot of resentment on them.

Y: Yeah, but when back in nineteenth century they did not have a good reputation. They were considered drinkers, and they were considered trouble makers like today, Hispanic people.

W: Do you know why? Who controlled the textiles in those days? Think of that? Who? I'm asking you a question. We're going down in history now.

Y: Well English people.

W: You got the answer. To this day they don't get along. So if the English control the textile industry, they didn't want the Irish to work for them. That's why they were band. They never liked them. They never will.

Y: Today still they fight and uh (–)

W: That's what I said, from 1910 to now. The only reason the Irish came up here in the United States was on account of the potato famine they had in Ireland. That's when they all came over here in the ships. But they found out they couldn't work in textiles, because all the bosses were English. And English had no use for the Irish. They'd rather hire the Italians. So the Italians came over. But originally if you look at the history of Lawrence, Billy Wood himself was Portuguese. Yet he hired, the Masons that built the Wood Mill were all Italians. Now [pause], now they were [unclear] over here in Methuen. Millionaire. He hired those Masons after they finished the Wood Mill to build his great stone walls around his Estates. They built miles and miles of walls.

Y: Like the Chinese big wall?

W: Yeah, they built that. Now after all that building was done, where could the Italians go? They didn't want to go back to the old country, because they were making money here. Billy Wood hired them to work on his textile mills. Can't you see the connection? (Y: Yeah) Most of the bosses over there, there were a few English, but there were a lot of Italian bosses.

Y: If you ask the Italians, they say most of the bosses were English, Scottish, in the Wood Mill.

W: Yes. No. Why don't you, why don't you ask them, "what was this manager? Who was the Manager of the Wood Mill?" Was he English? He was Portuguese. The guy that owned the Wood Mill was Portuguese. The Manager was Portuguese. The guy that I worked for was English, the boss. But all his underlings, like the supervisors, were all Italians, because they would converse with the Italian people. There was a go between. The liaison man was the Italian's. Go tell your workers, I want this, I want that. He'd go and tell them in Italian. He would tell them in English. They wouldn't understand what he said.

Y: Yeah.

W: Now I know the Wood Mill. You take the man in the washroom, he was Italian. The man who controlled the card room, he was Italian. Now I don't know about the rest of the rooms. The room that I worked in, winding and twisting, they were Italian fixers, they were Italian supervisors, but the boss himself was English. The rest I don't know. It was a heck of a big place. Do you realize they worked ten thousand people in that place?

Y: Well working in Honeywell, did you know what the company used to produce? Did you see the end product?

W: Of course, I saw it from beginning to end.

Y: Well you said you were tied up with that office, and you packed certain parts.

W: Well you weren't exactly tied to a place that you couldn't move out of. I had to go to places and ask questions about parts. When do you want them out? Sometimes they call by phone. They wouldn't answer the phone, they were too busy. So I had to leave my area and go up to

their area.

Y: So what did Honeywell produce?

W: Computers.

Y: What kind?

W: Well they put the big computers. They were the card readers, the printers, the disc drives. Those are three of their basic machines they put out.

Y: Yeah, I went and visited that place and talked to some of the top managers. (W: McCarty? Jean McCarty, redhead) I didn't know his name.

W: He's the manager there now.

Y: And he said they don't really produce things, they assemble it, they assemble things there. Some of the parts uh (--)

W: They in a sense, the word that you're using, produce, is from scratch from a raw material to a finished material. No, they do not. They assemble things into our product.

Y: Some of the parts are uh (--)

W: Pre-made.

Y: Are made in the far East Asia, those chips and things, and they put them together. (W: Yeah, right) And he said we call it assembling, putting together some of the parts. And uh, (--)

W: Yeah, they assembled parts. They don't manufacture parts.

Y: So there was not as much favoritism in Honeywell?

W: No, not really.

Y: But there were some cases probably. [Few words unclear]

W: The only place where I can see where a lot of favoritism was being done was in the what we so call the day workers. People in the clerical positions, or secretaries and stuff like that. They probably had a little fooling around to get places. In other words a boss could say, well I want her there tomorrow, I want him. You didn't have to pass any test or anything. But once you're on a manufacturing floor, what we call a manufacturing floor, you had to pass test to be able to do a job. The test, the test you pass was what you made for salary. Like the salary to help, they could fool around with, that was the story. You couldn't fool around with me, because that was a set thing. I past test to get my job, and nobody could push me out unless I did something wrong.

Y: Did they hire (--)

W: I got four more minutes.

Y: Four more minutes? Textile workers in, I mean you are one of the very few who worked in the textile mills? That's why I don't find anyone like you?

W: Well uh, I would say I was one of the very first few. There were a few of us, not many. Not many. I'll be honest with you. Because computers were looking for younger people, really. The younger you were the better they could train you. The older you are the harder (--)

End of tape.